

# **The Untold Saga Of The Presence**

**Of Kukis In Manipur**

**Since Time Immemorial**

**- Ngulminthang**

# The Untold Saga Of The Presence Of Kukis In Manipur Since Time Immemorial

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History, Migration, Records, etc. has been quite a topic these days. I do enjoy reading when our well known Historians share their opinions and views through Print Media, Internets, Networking Sites, etc. etc. This entire hot History topic surfaced recently with one counter claiming the other and vice versa due to the District-hood Demand of Sardar Hills. I do believe that sticking on to Concrete History will be the best way to have a glimpse of our status at present.

Recently, I have been reading lots of Opinions and Articles by our fellow Manipuri Naga Historians who tried their best to portray the position of "Kukis". I do accept their views about "Kuki" and their Write up History about "Kuki". But after reading all of these articles, a big BLANK dominates me. I do not understand what they actually mean by "Kuki".

Even after spending hours of concentrating on the Carefully Drafted articles, I still couldn't make out what they actually meant by "Kuki" and who they actually meant by "Kuki People". Almost all the articles are so twisted that even the sentences counters the other one. Most of our Historians who finds pleasure in falselessly depicting a particular group might not be able to define themselves if i were to ask what they mean by "Kuki" and "Kuki People". It is therefore best to know what we are talking about when we are to emphasize a particular Group.

My purpose of writing this article is neither about Sadar Hills nor Naga History but for a Concrete View on Kuki History in Manipur and North East India based on Colonial Records and Regional Records of Kings or Maharajas. To be frank, I am not a Historian or a Researcher, but as a lover of Literature and a preserver of History, I do like to share my little knowledge of History which I know about.

In Manipur, all of the three Major Ethnic Groups- Meiteis, Kacha Nagas aka Manipuri Nagas and Kukis migrated and settled in the Manipur Soil. None of these three groups were born in Manipur though the period of their migration and settlement can vary from one group to

another.(Lalit, 1965, History of Manipur). Colonist writers who mostly wrote about Manipur divided the whole people into two main groups, Kuki and Naga. Tribes which shared the same linguistic group having the same linguistic roots etc were group under Kuki.

On the other hand, tribes who have different linguistic roots and who cannot communicate within themselves in their own dialects were grouped under Naga (Dr Brown, Hill Country and Tribes of Manipur, 1820). In this regard Meiteis were categorised under Kuki owing to the Linguistic affinity with the other Kuki Groups. (Land and People of Indian States and Union Territories, SC Bhatt, Gopal Bhargava, 2001).

#### Relation between Meiteilon and Kuki-Chin Languages:

History of Meiteis or Meiteilon becomes an essential point while dealing with the History of Kukis in Manipur. It is commonly an accepted fact that Kukis and Meiteis are different groups and different people. Yet the linguistic bond between these two groups always speaks about some unknown History which might have occurred. Dr Gierson was the first colonial researcher to present the relationship between Meiteilon and Kuki-Chin Languages.

He categorised Meiteilon as a Kuki-Chin Languages and many researchers followed his views. There are some opposition to Dr Gierson's works of classifying Meiteilon as a Kuki-Chin Language, the latest opposition being from Dr Irengbam Mohendra Singh. Though Dr Irengbam tried his best to oppose Dr Gierson's works, he still couldnot find an answer to some of the few facts which Dr Gierson presented about Meiteilon and Kuki-Chin Language. This particular relationship of Meiteilon and Kuki Languages leaves us some sort of Rational Clue about these two groups of People, Meiteis and Kukis.

Researchers who made thorough research on Meiteilon gave their conclusion on Meiteilon this way:

Sino Tibetan > Tibeto-Burman > Arakan Burmese > Kuki-Chin > Manipuri /Meithei / Meitei. Manipuri, popularly known as Meiteilon / Meithei is historically one of the sister languages of Kuki-Chin groups of Arakan Burmese branch of Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Sino-Tibetan family of Language. However, W. Ibohal Singh (1986) opines that old Manipuri, which was developed in 900 A.D., was a product of Pre historic Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman of 800 A.D. Medieval Manipuri, which was developed in 1200 A.D., was again a product of

Indo-Aryan and Old Manipuri (1000 A.D). Modern Manipuri (1600 A.D.) is the offshoot of Tibeto-Burman Kuki-Chin group and Medieval Manipuri.

### Kuki Status in Manipur Based on Linguistic Research:

The above para which clearly depicts the relationship between Meiteilon and Kuki-Chin clearly speaks about the Historical and Social presence of Kukis in the Hill Country/ Hills of Manipur since time immemorial. Dr W Ibohal in his work clearly presented that Modern Meiteilon which was in use since 1600 AD was based on Medieval Meiteilon and Kuki-Chin Languages.

In the views of a Linguist, Linguistic dominance can never occur in a short period of time. If Meiteilon could be a product of Medieval Meitei and Kuki-Chin, it would mean that the Kukis were very much present in Manipur much before 1600 AD. Taking Meiteis and Kukis into consideration, it would atleast take 200-300 years for one to dominate other or vice versa, not politically or socially but linguistically.

Relationship, Social and Political Influence, Time Period etc are all an essential feature for a particular Linguistic group to fully adopt the other one. Therefore we can clearly conclude that Kukis were present in Manipur much before 1600 AD, contrary to some self-styled Naga Historians representing Kukis in Manipur as arriving by 1850.

"Kukis" as recorded in the Royal Chronicles of Meitei and Tripura Kings.

The word "Kuki" finds a respected position in both of the Chronicles of Meitei and Tripura Kings. In the Royal Chronicles of Tripura, Shiva has been quoted as falling in love with a Kuki Women in around 32 AD. Again in the same Chronicles, we find mention of Tripura Prince marrying a Kuki Princess in 1415 AD. (Basumatry 1920). The Kukis were the single largest tribes inhabiting the Tripura Hills before the rise of the Debbarmas.(Basumatry, 1920). King Dhanya Manikya who ruled Tripura between 1490 - 1520 AD brought home a Gong presented by Kuki Chiefs on one of his friendly visits. (Roy, 1965)

In the Cheitharol Kumbaba, we find that a Kuki by the name Taothingmang became the King of Manipur in 186 Skabda (264 AD). Again in 33 CE, two Kukis by the name Kuki Ahongba and Kuki

Achouba were allies to the Nongba Liren Pakhangba. King Irengba who reigned Manipur between 1107-1127 AD had contacts with Kuki Villages North of Imphal Valley.(Asim Roy, 1997).

L Joychandra (Lost Kingdoms 1995:1), noted that Manipuri King Naofanga who reigned between 624 AD and 714 AD had Friendship Treaties with Kuki Chiefs East of Imphal.

From all these above Historical and Linguistic Evidences it is ample clear that Kukis were present in Manipur as far as History is concerned. This fact contradicts most of our recent Naga Historians depiction of Kukis arriving as late as 1850.

The fact that Col Johnstone recorded Kukis as spotted only around 1850's is not an issue to ponder about. Col Johnstone or any colonial writer never presented or reported that Kukis migrated into Manipur only around 1850. They only spoke about the year when they first came in contact with the Kukis. Had Col Johnstone or Higgins or McCulloch, arrived in Manipur in 1600, they would have reported the Kukis as spotted in 1600 AD.

Captain Butler who in 1873 was Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills in his Report to the Revenue Proceedings 1873, Nos, 120 to 132, mentioned Kacha Nagas as first spotted in 1839 as tribes living in the Jungly Hills due south of the Angami Country (Mc Kenzie, NE frontier of India). Col Johnstone in his report on "Aggressions of Chassad Kookies" mentioned ""the Tankhools are Manipur subjects and occupy the Hill country East of the Valley. They were first mentioned in Dr Brown's account of the Hill country and tribes under the rule of Manipur in 1867".

From all these above Historical accounts, we find that Kacha Nagas aka Manipuri Nagas too were spotted as late as 1860's. Colonial Writings clearly reveal the supremacy of Kukis over the Hill Country in Manipur. The whole of Present Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts traditionally and historically belongs to Kukis (Mc Kenzie, 1884). The supremacy of Kukis over the Hills of Manipur have been carefully presented in Capt Brodie's accounts 1842. (Brodie's Tour, 1842, Mc Kenzie).

The Manipuri Nagas who were subjects under Kuki Chieftainship for Centuries do not have any right to question Kuki Inguinity in the Hills of Manipur. Kukis were the sole rulers of the Hill Country and Historical

records support this. There have never been mentions of a Tangkhul or Zeliang Naga dominating Kukis in any of the Colonial Writings. Infact most of the colonial writers depicted Manipuri Nagas as Slaves of Kuki, living under the Mercy of Kuki Lords.(Col Johnstone, Report to the Resident at Mandalay, 1873)

In most of the Colonial Writings, we find limited informations on Manipuri Nagas. The word Naga has common occurence in any Colonial Writings but whenever we hunt for Informations on Tangkhuls or any other Kacha Nagas, we run out of Pages. This is simple proof that Tangkhuls or any other Kacha Nagas were not known much. Infact the whole of Kacha Naga/Manipuri Naga populace boomed out only after 1940's(G. Dey 1986:809).

History of Manipuri Nagas in context of Manipuri Kings records depicts them as loyal subjects of Meitei Kings at the same time paying an annual tax "Changseu" to their Kuki Lords though their period of Slavery under Kukis is not clear. (History of Manipur, 1998 : 205).

A Tangkhul friend once told me about Tangkhuls in the olden days. He told me that whenever they hear of Kuki Chiefs passing by they use to hide their pigs because if the Chief likes it he simply takes it and his Tangkhul subjects have to watch his actions. Such was the dominance of Kukis over the Hills of Manipur.

Summing up all of these points based on Colonial Writings and Local Records, it is more than clear that Kukis were the sole rulers of the Hill Country. Their power mostly due to their neat administrative setup based on the complete authority of Chiefs. On the other hand, Head Hunting Nagas often fought among themselves which led to many Naga villages seeking refuge of Kuki Chiefs. (Mac Culloch, 1878).

The Meitei religion "Sanamahi" is based on the Kuki religion of "Indoi"(Richard M Eaton 1997). Due to the Rich Cultural Heritage and Neat Administrative Setup, Kukis could rule over the Hill Country, unlike the frequently fighting Head Hunting Nagas. (Mills Report 1854,). In the Assam Proceedings of 1854 Mills presented a survey report of Villages in Manipur Hill Country as follows:

Old Kookies = 89.

New/Naia Kookies = 145.

Tabloong or Naked = 30.

Sangloi or Changnoi =?

Zami Nagas = 5.

Source: Assam Proceddings, 1854, A Mackenzie, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Govt of Bengal, No-3150, dated Calcutta, the 19th August 1873.

Therefore, we are now left to conclude that the Hills of Manipur except for Mao Dominance were all under the Kuki Chiefs and it belongs to the Kukis traditionally, culturally and historically. The 1993 massacre on innocent Kukis by armed Nagas are ample proof of Kuki dominance in the hills. If the Manipuri Nagas were so dominant they would never have bothered massacring innocent Kukis or someone lower than them that too, in the name of Christ.

Politics of Manipuri Nagas are dirty and condemnable to the highest extent possible. Using religion as a shield to flush out past angers on a particular group is one such example. The questions that now arises are:

1. Are Manipuri Nagas in position to question Kuki Ingenuity in the Hills of Manipur.?
2. Are Manipuri Nagas in a position to claim Traditional and Historical Lands of Kukis as rightfully theirs? If so on what historical grounds?
3. Did any Colonial writer ever depict Kukis as living in Naga territory?
4. Which part of Hills in Manipur is traditionally of the Nagas?
5. Did Manipuri Nagas ever rule over the Kukis?
6. Colonial writers never pictured today's Manipuri Nagas as Naga. On what grounds are they Naga?
7. Who ruled over the hills till 1947?

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OFFICE OF THE  
**KUKI NATIONAL ORGANISATION**  
**GOVERNMENT OF ZALE'N-GAM**

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*Ref No: ZG/OS 01-12/16      Dated Manmasi, 17 September 2019*

Political Transparency  
The Kuki National Organisation

Considering Kuki and Meitei relationship from time immemorial, KNO stepped down from demand for Statehood to Territorial Council, i.e. to stay with our brother Meiteis within Manipur.

The closely entwined history of Meitei and Kuki is over two millennia old. On record, the Pooyas, written in the traditional Meitei Mayek, refers to the long-standing cordial relationship between Meitei and Kuki, referred to as Ching buroi, dwellers of the highlands. For example, in AD 33, Kuki Achouba and Kuki Ahongba assisted king Pamheiba, whose ascension to the throne was contested by Khaba, his younger brother. Khaba and his followers were forced to flee to the settlements of Chingburoi in present-day Hundung, Hundung Khunou and Ningthi.

When Maharaja Chandra Kirti Sing was taken captive, the Kuki soldiers were sent and rescue and was set on the Meitei Throne again. In another instance, Kuki's positive response to King Chourajit's overture in the Ava War of 1810 elicited the eloquent verse:  
Chingna koina pansaba, Haona koina pan ngakpa, Manipur sana leimayoi.

The hills surround Manipur, the Golden Land, like a ring surround Manipur, the Golden Land, like a barricade, the hill people defend the valley.

The 'Framework Agreement' threatens to include the hills of Manipur to Nagalim.

Amongst the present-day hill Districts, Kamjong (formerly Chassad) District adjacent to Utkhrul district dominated by Tangkhul, is at particular risk. I would like to illustrate the background of the Kamjong district and its inhabitants. The principal Kuki chief of Chassad (now Kamjong) was Pu Pache Haokip, the eldest in the Haokip clan. Pu Pache was a prominent leader of the Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919, in which Lieutenant Molesworth of the Burma Military Police was killed. Following the Anglo-Kuki War, the British created a Police was killed. Following the Anglo-Kuki War, the British created a Sub-Division at Chassad to gain control of the region.

The term Kamjong is a corruption of 'Camp John', which the British established. In 1917, Chassad was changed to Kamjong with a view to obliterate Kuki history in the region. The other two newly created Sub-Divisions were Laijang (now Tamenglong) and Songpi (now Churachandpur). Besides the Haokip people, the other kindred clans people of Chassad (latterly Kamjong) are Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai or Maring people) and Kharam. Prior to the arrival of the British, the Tangkhul people from Somara Tract in present-day Myanmar (Burma) often raided Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai people) and Kharam. The chief Kharan, Lairam (Lai people) and Kharam. The chief of Chassad protected these kindred people from the Tangkhul raiders, and in appreciation was offered tax and tributes.

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During the 1917-1919 War, Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai or Maring people) and Kharam fought with the chief of Chassad. When the chief of Chassad was imprisoned after the war, the Tangkhul missionaries began to convert the 'Old Kuki' groups Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai or Maring people) and Kharam to Christianity. Over a period of time, Tangkhul became their spoken dialect, although the Kuki language was the lingua franca among the people of Chassad and the surrounding areas. A Government account states: in March 1922, Mr LL Peters, the Sub-Divisional Officer at Utkhrul appeared for the examination to 'pass in the Kuki language', one of the six languages 'for which rewards [Rs 1000] are given under the Rules for the encouragement of the study of the languages of Frontier tribes Notification No. 10,000 C., dated 3rd September 1907.'

It is a matter of historical fact that the Tangkhul people initially refused to take part in the movement of Naga National Council led by AZ Phizo. However, by 1963, when the movement gained sufficient momentum and Nagaland was granted Statehood, Tangkhul began to subscribe to the identity Naga. Taking advantage of the wave of the Naga movement, they resumed their old tactic of plundering the Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai or Maring people) Mongmi, Kamo, Kharan, Lairam (Lai or Maring people) and Kharam and forced them to identify as Tangkhul.

Besides, beginning in 1950s, many Kuki chiefs and leaders were systematically killed, which prompted many to leave Chassad in vast numbers. In 1992, NSCN (IM), in full scale, carried out the infamous Kuki genocide to forcibly acquire Kuki lands. The catastrophe left over a thousand innocent Kukis dead, three hundred and fifty-odd villages uprooted and hundreds of thousands displaced.

The Kuki Chiefs Association, Manipur submitted Memorandum to Government of Manipur in 2003 and 2013, respectively to ensure Kuki villages in the hill districts to be protected from inclusion to the NSCN (IM) Nagalim. The Memorandums appeal is to locate the Kuki villages in Utkhrul, Tamenglong, and Senapati according to their geographical proximity to the districts Sadar Hills (now Kangpokpi), Chandel (now to Tengnoupal), and Churachandpur.

KIM One-day Symposium at Classic Grande on the theme WEAVING STRANDS OF BROTHERHOOD was held 29 January 2019.

The One-Day Symposium 'Weaving Strands of Brotherhood' organised at Hotel Classic Grande, on the 29 January, 2019 by the Kuki Inpi Manipur, wherein renowned Scholars & eminent

age old connections between the Kukis and Meiteis. This occasion was between the Kukis and Meiteis. This occasion was attended by Office bearers of UCM, AMUCO, Meira Paibi and KIM.

In line with the subject of the Symposium, noted Scholars like Dr Letkhojam Haokip, (Associate Professor, History Department, Guwahati University), Pu Hareshwar Goshwami ( MCS Retd, Writer, Politician), who both had devoted years of extensive research and studies in the subject, presented their findings/paper at length at the OneDay Symposium. Renowned Social Scientists like Dr Dhanabir Laishram, Dr Priyadarshini Gangte and others also shared their views on the subject.

The program of the Symposium - the historic intellectual discourse between the brethren's KUKI & MEITEIS which was conducted under the aegis of the Kuki Inpi Manipur, was Telecasted on the \*20/2/2019 at 6 PM on the ISTV KUKI CHANNEL NO. 0110\*.

Pan Naga Territorial demand is certain, although details of 'Naga Framework Agreement 2015' is not in the public domain.

It is in view of consolidating Kuki and Meitei age-old relationship that KNO stepped down from demand for Statehood to Territorial Council. In other words, KNO has taken the initiative to strengthen Manipur's territorial integrity.

However, in the event that talks between Gol and NSCN-IM were to contemplate some consideration of the demand for integration of 'Naga' inhabited areas, to ensure none of the territory inhabited by Meitei, such as Hundung Khullen and Hungdung Khunou in Kamjong district, of which 70% is inhabited by Maring Old Kukis and the rest by New Kuki and Meitei, it is imperative that to achieve the objective of keeping intact the territorial integrity of Manipur to the max possible, both Meitei and Kuki must cooperate.

The KNO would hope that its stated political transparency behooves reciprocity from concerned quarters of the community.

Sd/-

Stephen Kuki  
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MANMASI

